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In God we trust

Extension Homework and Classroom Assignments

Ali Emami

To my wife and my son

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Abstract

This study was conducted to determine whether different types of homework assignments influenced the acquisition of vocabulary knowledge and if the students provided with extension homework acquired vocabulary better than those just given the classroom assignments. The study was conducted over the course of 2 months and took place in the public high schools in Chavar, Ilam. The participants of the study were 120 high school students. A pre-test was administered to determine the homogeneity of the groups. The mean scores of the groups were 24.5 and 25 out of 50, for the experimental and control groups, respectively, and t -observed (0.41) was much smaller than t -critical (1.67), so they were nearly homogeneous. In order to carry out this study, control and experimental groups were used. The control group was assigned classroom activities that were based on practicing skills covered during the lesson. The experimental group was assigned homework containing a combination of practice tasks, classroom activities, and homework assignments. A post-test was administered to determine if extension homework had an effect on their vocabulary acquisition. The mean scores for two groups were 34.5 and 30.65 out of 50, for experimental and control groups, respectively. The test scores of the two groups were compared, and it was determined that the students who received extension homework- the experimental group- had a better understanding of taught vocabulary than those who received just classroom assignments- the control group. A t -test was used to analyze the data. The t -observed (9.077) was much larger than t -critical (1.67), so the hypotheses were safely rejected. The findings of the study indicated that subjects who were assigned homework that contained practice exercises, classroom activities, and extension homework assignments learned the vocabulary better than subjects who were assigned just classroom assignments.

Key words: extension homework, classroom assignments, vocabulary acquisition

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Everyday, millions of school-age children arrive home from school. Some bring massive amounts of homework with them; others bring no homework at all. For some, homework is a piece of cake; for others, it is hard; and still for others, homework is designed to reinforce and review what is already learnt in school. Some children get homework assignments, but do not do these assignments. Other children begin their homework, but never seem to finish these homework tasks. Some teachers assign no homework at all, while others assign minimal homework.

A question is raised, "is homework an effective tool to help learners learn more?" (Townsend, 1995, p.13) There are some advantages to do homework: One enduring advantage of homework is that it furthers learning tasks through reinforcement, assimilation, practice and application, and has the support of current psychological principles based on research (LeFrancois, 1991). Another advantage of homework is that it allows students to complete unfinished assignments and make up work. Homework also helps students fall behind in school work because of their presumed lack of ability, intelligence, or circumstance.

Not all homes provide good study conditions, which is a disadvantage to students. Homework may also be used to punish the entire class for the trespasses of a few students. Sadly enough, the teachers agreed that homework is often ill-chosen and poorly designed due to teacher time constraints and lack of expertise. Many homework assignments are still thrown together at the last minute to fulfill a perceived requirement to assign homework.

Interest in the area of homework is so widespread because its assignment in our schools affects a variety of persons including students, teachers, and parents. Obviously, the student is affected because it is he or she who must carry out the assignment. The

teacher is involved in many ways. Planning for homework must be carried out by the teacher. The assignments and its subsequent evaluation are the responsibilities of the teacher. Teachers are the first to admit that this aspect of the instructional process is a tedious job, yet they make these assignments because they are committed to carrying out the various functions of teaching that will make the process successful, despite the undesirable elements that are a part of that assignment. Parents respect homework because they are really interested in their child's progress and feel that the assignment is going to complement their child's learning. There may be resistance to the assignments if these exercises interfere with the normal activities that are planned for the family. Thus, we see that homework –its assignment, its completion, and its assessment- forms a complex matrix from which positive or negative results can occur, depending upon the nature of that homework assignment. We must ask: is homework a desirable or necessary component of good teaching, and if not, why are teachers continually assigning these tasks? If homework is an essential ingredient in good teaching, why do all three parties (students, parents, and teachers) resist its employment? (Check & Ziebell, 1980).

With regard to the importance of homework on students' achievement in learning and retention of instructional materials, this study is an attempt to investigate the effectiveness of extension homework on high school students' learning and to compare the role of extension homework with class-work assignments. It also tries to investigate if students provided with extension assignments learn much more than those provided with class-work assignments or not.

1.2 Statement of the Problem and the Purpose of the Study

Researchers have investigated the impact of homework on student achievement. However, one limitation of many studies is that they are concentrated on the issue of homework versus no homework.

According to Gill and Schlossman (2000), the topic of homework remains a secondary issue in teacher training institutions. There is only limited interest in transforming homework into a valuable teaching experience (Gill & Schlossman, 2000). The purpose of the education professional is to find different ways to improve student achievement. Research on different types of homework assignments would allow educators to use homework in a way that maximizes its effectiveness. As Marzano and Pickering (2007) claim, homework designed and implemented properly can be a powerful tool to improve student achievement. Therefore, school administrators should make sure that teachers use this tool correctly.

Poor performance of Iranian high school students in their English is a matter of serious concern among those in and around education, and their quest for finding suitable remedies is getting more and more intense. So, Assigning enough homework and class-work to high school students and checking what they have done is one of the most important things that can help them overcome their difficulties in learning English as their second language.

The present study is dedicated to finding out whether there is a relationship between the assignments done in classroom and those done out- of- classroom by the students and their achievement of learning vocabulary. It also tries to show how important the homework assignment is in the retention of what has been taught. In so doing, there

will be an attempt to provide answers to the questions related to the effect of extension assignment on achievement and enhancement of the students' language ability.

1.3 Research Questions

Homework is one of the biggest challenges and concerns teachers face in their teaching profession. The assignment of homework can be beneficial, neutral, or detrimental depending upon the nature and context of homework tasks (Rashtchi, 1384). However, creating meaningful and appropriate homework assignments and getting students to complete the assignments properly and successfully are very difficult. It is also difficult to create assignments that appeal to every single student in a large class of heterogeneous students. The teacher's responsibility is to provide assignments that vary in style, format, and content. It is also possible to provide students with choices in doing homework. Assigning different kinds of homework is another task of the teacher. It makes the students understand that they can not learn English unless they themselves take at least part of the responsibility of their learning.

According to Harmer (2000), students should realize that they can not succeed unless they study in their own time, doing homework, and thinking about what and how they should learn. As assigning suitable homework can improve the students' learning, the present study was conducted to find out the impact of extension homework and class-work on students' learning ability. The following questions represent the general purpose of this study:

1. Is there any significant relationship between extension homework and students' learning in vocabulary acquisition?

2. Do the students given extension homework learn the language significantly better than the control group which is given a regular amount of homework?

1.4 Hypotheses

1. The use of extension homework bears a significant and positive relationship to achievement of vocabulary if it is carefully designed.

2. Students given extension homework will improve their learning ability significantly more than those doing just the classroom assignments.

3. There is a significant and direct relationship between doing extension homework and students' learning of vocabulary.

1.5 Significance of the Study

Homework is helpful if it is based upon pupils' needs and individually assigned projects. It is an effective way to make up work missed by absences from school, and may also aid in overcoming the academic difficulty a student is experiencing. Homework should assist students who work to their capacities, and increases their breadth of understanding.

When teachers assign homework, the question they have to ask themselves is what they expect the students to gain from the experience. Homework should have specific objectives. It should be planned, assigned carefully, and followed up by members of the teaching staff. Homework may consist of either "study time" and/or "tasks assigned". "Study time" is defined as the review of notes, textbooks, and other materials for reinforcement, required reading or test preparation. "Tasks assigned" necessitates the

preparation of a specific product. Homework should be an extension of the classroom learning experience, and must not be used for disciplining or punishment (Marzano, 2001).

Homework refers to any work planned and approved by the teacher to be completed by the students outside of the regular classroom without the teacher's immediate supervision. Homework is also defined as the out of class tasks that students are assigned as an extension of their classroom work (La Conte, 1981). Homework is an integral part of the educational process and life-long learning experience (Marzano, 2001), and addresses one or more of the following objectives that are the main purpose of the study:

To enrich and extend the school experience;

To direct students toward good work habits;

To bring pupils into contact with out-of-school learning resources;

To provide essential practice in developing skills;

To permit growth in self-responsibility, self-direction, and learning;

To understand if extension homework makes the students extend their learning much more than classroom assignment.

This study has tried to investigate the relationship between extension homework and students' vocabulary learning. It has also tried to show that the students provided with both homework and class-work assignments will improve their learning ability much more than those provided just with class-work assignments.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

Whenever a study is done, it is influenced by many factors. One of them is the limitations of that study. This study has had its own limitations as well. One of them was the number of the participants. 120 students were selected among all students in this

district (about 250 high school students). Another limitation was the lack of cooperation of the schools and their principals. They did not let the students, especially females, attend the extraordinary classes. Although the researcher has been teaching English in both male and female high schools for more than 15 years, he was asked to have formal permission from the office administrator to do the study in female high schools.

The shortage of time was another limitation. Because there were four groups in this study- one experimental male group, one control male group, one experimental female group, and one control female group, it took a lot of time. Matching the groups with allotted time was so difficult because they were studying in two-shift schools.

1.7 Definition of key words

Homework: Homework or Extension homework refers to tasks assigned to students by their teachers to be completed outside of class.

Classroom assignments: Classroom assignments refer to tasks assigned to students by their teachers to be completed right after the instruction during the class hours in the classroom.

Acquisition: Acquisition refers to the first stages of learning when a response is established. In classical conditioning, acquisition refers to the period of time when the stimulus comes to evoke the conditioned response.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

Homework has been the topic of spirited debate for more than 100 years. During this time, public attitude has shifted dramatically from positive to negative and back again. In the early 20th century, homework was considered a key schooling strategy, an important means of disciplining the child's mind through memorization. The mind was viewed as a muscle that could be strengthened through mental exercise. Since exercise could be done at home, homework was viewed favorably. At that time, many educators thought of homework as a means for disciplining children's minds (Brinks, 1937). From the end of the nineteenth century through the 1940s, the child health and progressive education movements led to an attack on homework for elementary school and junior high school students. Some even blamed homework for the child mortality rate, and a writer of the period called Nash referred to homework as a "legalized criminality"(Gill & Schlossman, 1996).

That changed in the 1940s as the emphasis in education shifted from learning through memorization and drill to developing student problem-solving ability and initiative. In the 1940s, a trend toward less homework followed an emerging emphasis on problem-solving ability, as opposed to learning through drill and memorization. Home study was also perceived as an intrusion on students' time and private activities (Gill & Schlossman, 1996).

Events in the 1950s reversed this trend with the advent of the space race. Educators once again viewed homework as a means for accelerating the pace of knowledge acquisition. But by the late 1950s, homework, again, grew in popularity. Worried that education in the United States lacked rigor, the public felt homework might speed up knowledge acquisition. In the early 1960s, parents became concerned that children were